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ABSTRACT

Designed for educators actively involved with the teaching of writing, this summary report contains an overview of the background, major findings, and recommendations of the 1979 Manitoba (Canada) Writing Assessment Program. Various sections of the report provide the following information: (1) highlights of the general report of the program; (2) the purpose, nature, and rationale for the program; (3) the design, construction, and scoring of the tests; (4) a summary of the results for grades three, six, nine, and twelve; and (5) conclusions and recommendations. (FL)

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MANITOBA WRITING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM
SUMMARY REPORT

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A report of the
Measurement and Evaluation Branch
Department of Education
Province of Manitoba
November, 1979

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PREFACE

This Summary Report provides an overview of the background, major findings, and recommendations of the 1979 Manitoba Writing Assessment Program, and is designed for readers who require an overview of the program but not the details provided by the other reports. The more detailed presentation of the assessment results is given in the General Report, which contains complete information on the program and its results. A Technical Report, which contains information more useful to educators involved in the technical aspects of test design and analysis, also will be available.

A Summary Report, because it represents a large amount of complex data in an abbreviated form, can be misleading if treated out of context. The reader is particularly cautioned not to regard this summary as a complete picture of the writing assessment program and is referred to the General Report for more detailed information and analysis.

It is emphasized, moreover, that those persons closely associated with the Assessment Program have been acutely aware of the limitations of the assessments; readers of the reports are urged to be equally cautious. All measurements of human performances are estimates of actual skills and thus subject to some error. Every effort has been made to minimize the error but it can occur in a variety of ways: the selecting of objectives, the setting of test items to fit objectives, the weighting of items, the interpreting of items by students, the categorizing of student responses and marking of papers, the judging of results, and the presenting of results--to name a few. Furthermore, the intent of the assessment was to obtain estimates of group performance. Use of the tests for individual student diagnosis or grading, therefore, should not be attempted, except in conjunction with other tests and assessments.

A second concern regarding the interpretation of results is that it is not possible to attribute strengths and weaknesses to specific aspects of instruction, such as programming or teaching. The variety of societal factors, including changes in the aims of schooling, need to be considered when interpreting the results. The assessment can provide some indication of what our students can do and it is up to us to judge whether we wish to make changes because of these results.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the Writing Assessment results are indicators of a narrow band of the kinds of things that students can and ought to do. Any change that is brought about because of these results must take into consideration possible impact on other aspects of learning which may be equally or even more important.

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An assessment of this scope would not have been possible without the collaboration of the many people involved in the test and report production and the cooperation of the students who wrote the tests and their teachers. It is impossible to enumerate all who contributed but certain people and groups deserve special mention:

- . Dr. Dolores MacNaughton who gave professional assistance to all aspects of the program.
- . The Joint Committee on Evaluation which provided guidance throughout the whole process.
- . The Technical Advisory Committee which advised on the test production and scoring and the analysis of results.
- . The many teachers who participated in the review of objectives.
- . The schools and their students that assisted in the administration of the pilot tests.
- . The scorers who gave up a weekend as well as teaching days to score the provincial sample.
- . The Interpretation Panel which carefully adjudicated the results of the testing.
- . The divisions and schools which released their teachers to work on the program and provided assistance in obtaining the sample.
- . The staff of the Measurement and Evaluation Branch, the Research Branch, and other Branches of the Department of Education who provided necessary support throughout the program.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WRITING ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Manitoba students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 were assessed on writing ability by the Department of Education as part of the ongoing provincial program of student assessment in major subject areas. In May of 1979, a total of 4,989 student papers (approximately 9 percent of enrollment at these grades) was submitted to the Department for scoring as the provincial sample. Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 are the final grades of the primary, elementary, junior and senior programs, and were selected for assessment because they could provide information on writing skills at important stages of student growth and development.

The tests were designed to assess students on global writing performance and on their performance of a number of specific writing tasks. Students in the four grades were required to write in a sustained manner: a story in grades 3 and 6; a paragraph in grade 9, and an expository essay in grade 12. (An expository essay has as its purpose the statement and explanation of an explicit idea, argument, or philosophy, and thus is distinct from story writing.) Students were also required to answer a number of specific questions on spelling, punctuation, grammar, and word usage.

The student papers that formed the provincial sample were marked by English Language Arts teachers drawn from locations throughout Manitoba. The actual written products--stories, paragraphs, and essays--were scored A. for global writing ability, and B. for performance on a number of key aspects of writing. The student papers were further scored C. for answers to the specific questions.

A. On the basis of the global assessment of the written products, the major findings regarding writing ability are:

- . Over 20 percent of the student writing at all four grades was of a high level of proficiency: the writing was relatively free from error.
- . An additional 50 percent of students in the four grades wrote at a level functional for their particular grade, but a portion of these exhibited some weaknesses in expression.
- . The remaining percentage of students exhibited greater weaknesses in writing, but less than 13 percent of students at all four grades wrote at a level that was clearly not functional for their grade. These students exhibited a considerable number of difficulties and weaknesses in writing.
- . Although the majority of students, over 70 percent, wrote at a level at least appropriate to their grade, within each grade level tested a variety of weaknesses occurred in the writing. If students exhibiting considerable difficulty in writing are combined with those whose writing was functional yet containing weaknesses, the percentages of students with weaknesses in their writing were:

50 percent at grade 3,
56 percent at grade 6,
34 percent at grade 9, and
53 percent at grade 12.

B. The written products were scored for performance on key aspects of writing: topic development (including unity, coherence, and organization), word usage, and mechanics. Interpretation

Panels of educators and school trustees judged the performance at each grade level of students on the whole. The Panels for the four grades initially specified their expectations of student performance on the key aspects and then compared these to actual performance of the sample of students. Based on overall performance of the sample of students, judgements were made on the scale: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

The major findings of the Interpretation Panels, regarding overall student performance on key aspects of writing, are:

- . At the grade 3 level, performance on all nine aspects assessed was rated as Acceptable or Satisfactory.
- . At the grade 6 level, performance on nine of the ten aspects assessed was rated as Acceptable or Satisfactory. Performance on the tenth aspect, organization, was rated as Highly Satisfactory.
- . At the grade 9 level, performance on six of the nine aspects assessed on the paragraph was rated as Acceptable or Satisfactory. Performance on the three remaining aspects of topic focus, word usage, and spelling was rated Highly Satisfactory.
- . At the grade 9 level, performance on two of the three aspects assessed on the business letter was rated as Acceptable. Performance on the third aspect, letter format, was rated Unsatisfactory.
- . At the grade 12 level, performance of seven of the eight aspects assessed was rated as Acceptable or higher. Performance on two of the seven, punctuation and spelling, was rated as Highly Satisfactory for both English 300 and 301 students. Performance on the eighth aspect, word usage, was rated as Marginal for both 300 and 301 students.

C. At each of the four grades, overall student performance on the specific skills assessed by short-answer questions was judged by the Interpretation Panels. The major findings of the Interpretation Panels, regarding overall student performance on specific skills, are:

- . At the grade 3 level, performance on 18 of the 20 skills assessed was rated as Acceptable or higher.
- . At the grade 6 level, performance on 22 of the 34 skills assessed was rated as Acceptable or higher.
- . At the grade 9 level, performance on eight of the 13 skills, and on spelling on the whole, was rated as Acceptable or higher.
- . At the grade 12 level, performance on 17 of the 26 skills, and on spelling on the whole, was rated as Acceptable or higher for both English 300 and 301 students.
- . At grades 6, 9, and 12, approximately half of the skills in punctuation were rated as Marginal or Unsatisfactory in performance.

In general, as many as 50 percent of students were considered to have some weaknesses in actual writing, but these weaknesses were not necessarily on aspects common to the majority of students at the particular grade level. Also, weaknesses that appeared on questions related to specific skills did not typically appear in actual written products.

Recommendations

While the findings of this Writing Assessment indicate that student performance on average is acceptable, there is evidence that as many as 50 percent of students are in need of an increased and more consistent emphasis on writing. Since the ability to communicate in writing is so fundamental to future success, it is strongly suggested that the Minister through his Department support a number of recommendations.

Some of the more important of these are:

- . That the General Report be considered in detail for implications for development and implementation of curriculum.
- . That curriculum emphasize a wide range of writing abilities, and provide for student practice in a variety of writing types.
- . That consideration be given to the demands of writing in additional curriculum areas.
- . That the pattern of workshops already initiated as a result of the Writing Assessment Program be continued to assist teachers in the identification of writing objectives, and the development of skills in the teaching and assessment of written expression.
- . That school divisions and schools establish workshops to consider the contents of the Writing Assessment Report in depth and to plan follow-up action appropriate to local needs.
- . That more emphasis be placed on the composing of written expression as a more effective method of instruction than the teaching of isolated skills.
- . That students be required to do more pointed writing exercises aimed at specific purposes and audiences.
- . That special attention be given to the diagnosis and instruction of students who are not functional writers.

INTRODUCTION

Measurement and Evaluation Branch

The Measurement and Evaluation Branch of the Department of Education was established in April, 1978 to develop and implement a provincial program of learning assessment in Manitoba schools in conjunction with a Joint Committee on Evaluation (representative of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Faculties of Education, and the Department of Education). The Committee was charged with the task of recommending to the Department appropriate patterns and procedures for the ongoing monitoring of student achievement and subsequently acting as a consultant to the Measurement and Evaluation Branch in the formulation and implementation of specific testing programs.

The following objectives for the overall program were recommended by the Committee and subsequently approved by the Minister of Education. These objectives constitute the guidelines for all testing programs conducted by the Measurement and Evaluation Branch and they apply specifically to the Writing Assessment to which this report is addressed.

1. To provide benchmark indicators about the level of student achievement in the Province of Manitoba through the systematic gathering of data by means of a 3 year cyclical program of testing in the areas of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics in the key grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 and of a non-cyclic pattern in additional grades and areas of the school curriculum selected according to identified needs, interests, and resources.
2. To develop accurate and systematic data on student achievement that would assist the process of curriculum improvement, both at provincial and local levels.
3. To assist school divisions in both student and system evaluation by supplying information on provincial results to each school to encourage the utilization of the data in conjunction with local evaluation.
4. To assist teachers in the improvement of their student evaluation skills through their active involvement at all stages of the process.

Results would be reported on a provincial basis only, and no individual students, schools, or school divisions would be identified. Provincial data would be reported to the Minister of Education and through the Minister to curriculum committees, Departmental staff, school divisions, and the general public. In addition to the issuing of reports, a series of regional meetings would be held for the purpose of discussing and analyzing test data.

THE WRITING ASSESSMENT: PURPOSE, NATURE, AND RATIONALE

In May of 1979, as the first phase of an ongoing program to survey student achievement in selected areas of the school curriculum, the Measurement and Evaluation Branch of the Department of Education conducted the Writing Assessment Program whereby the writing skills of students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 throughout Manitoba were assessed through the administration of tests to a 10 per cent random sample of students in each grade.

Writing was selected as the initial area of assessment in 1979 because it is a key area of the core subject of Language Arts and is basic to most school subjects. The ability of students to write effectively has been questioned by some, but at present information on the level of student writing in Manitoba is limited. In general, available data has provided fragmentary and often inconclusive results, although a considerable methodology has been developed; therefore, a systematic collection of data in Manitoba was necessary and feasible.

It was necessary to assess writing at a number of grade levels to provide some indication of skill development in students over a period of time as well as produce baseline data for future assessments of similar nature. Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 were considered appropriate for this purpose as they represent the last grades respectively of the primary, elementary, junior, and senior programs.

The Writing Assessment Program was not intended to assess the quality of particular courses of the Language Arts curriculum but rather to survey a broad range of writing skills considered important for effective communication. Writing is also fundamental to other curriculum areas and, although this does not mean that all forms of writing are the same or that the writing skills necessary for one purpose are identical to those necessary for another, there are some aspects that are common to most forms of prose writing; for example, ideas, organization, style, mechanics, and choice of words. These aspects form the basis for analytic or descriptive scales used to assess sustained writing in a holistic manner. (For an explanation of these terms, see pp. 11, 12.)

Some of the components of writing can be further analysed into specific aspects, such as spelling and punctuation, as well as more technical ones. These represent specific features of written expression that are presumed to be correlated with ability in the art of writing.

It was agreed that the assessment should provide indicators of student performance on specific aspects basic to writing as well as on overall writing ability. Writing performance would therefore be assessed in two major sections: a specific skills part that sampled particular features of writing, and a holistic part that provided both global and analytic ratings of a piece of sustained writing.

Procedures for the Assessment

Following the selection of Writing for assessment a Technical Advisory Committee was established to assist in actual production of the tests and review of the results. Language Arts teachers at the four grade levels formed the main body of the Committee, with Departmental

curriculum specialists acting as consultants. Dr. Dolores MacNaughton was contracted to assist in the technical aspects of test design, construction, and analysis, and worked in conjunction with the Committee and the Measurement and Evaluation Branch.

Writing objectives representative of goals at the four grade levels were compiled. In January, 1979 these were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee and then prioritized by approximately 300 teachers at six regional meetings throughout the Province located in Winnipeg (2), Carman, Brandon, Dauphin, and The Pas. On February 12, 1979 the Honourable Keith A. Cosens, Minister of Education, formally announced the testing program and the date as the morning of May 16, 1979. He further indicated that the tests would be written by and scored for a 10 percent random sample of students enrolled in public schools at the four grade levels. For teachers wishing to have their entire classes participate in the assessment, sufficient copies of the tests, together with the scoring manual to be used by the Department, would be made available. In addition, in response to subsequent requests, the Department offered seven inservice programs on holistic and descriptive scoring at various provincial centres.

Pilot tests were constructed and administered to 24 classrooms of students at six different locations in Manitoba. The completed pilot tests were used to revise the test instruments and provide practice in the scoring procedures. The revised tests and manuals were sent to schools in Manitoba in late April together with the lists of student names comprising the 10 percent random sample.

On the morning of May 16, 1979, an estimated 86 percent of students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 wrote the tests. A total of 4,989 test papers were returned to the Department for the sample: 1400, 1344, 1475, and 770 papers from students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 respectively. The numbers represent approximately 9 percent of grade enrollments as there was some loss in the sample, primarily due to student absence and transfer; in addition, grade 12 students who were not enrolled in a grade 12 English course in the spring semester were ineligible, reducing the actual number of papers at this level.

The tests were scored manually by 61 Manitoba teachers in June, 1979 and the results were compiled during July and August. In August, 1979, in the absence of previous criteria or norms, Interpretation Panels of Language Arts teachers and school trustees compared the results to their expectations of student performance to provide a general interpretation of the acceptability of performance levels.

General, Technical, and Summary Reports were prepared and reviewed by the Joint Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee during September and October and recommended for release.

DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, AND SCORING OF THE TESTS

The Writing Assessment Program was designed to obtain measures of writing performance at four grade levels. The first step in the process was to determine the aspects of writing to be assessed and to design the tasks that were to be asked of the students.

Determining the Objectives to be Assessed

The objectives for writing in the Language Arts program as defined by the Province of Manitoba are given in Table 1 (p. 8). These represent categories common to all grade levels but have varying degrees of emphasis. Initial writing objectives were derived primarily from these lists, but Language Arts programs throughout Canada were also consulted in the process. The result was a set of objectives appropriate for each grade level. These are summarized under the following headings in Table 2: Conventions of Writing, Concepts of Unity and Coherence, Organizing and Writing Patterns, Types of Writing, and Proofreading (pp. 9, 10).

These objectives were reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee and revised lists of objectives constructed which were reviewed by teachers throughout the Province at six regional meetings. Teachers were asked to rate the importance for testing of each of the objectives listed for their grade level on a four-point scale: 4 = Very Important, 3 = Above Average Importance, 2 = Below Average Importance, and 1 = Unimportant. At these meetings also teachers modified objectives, added to the list, indicated weightings for objectives, and suggested means of testing the objectives.

Since it was impossible to test all of the objectives, those objectives which were considered to be the most important were selected. It was necessary to consider simultaneously possible test questions or items that would fit each objective as these would give some indication of the time and effort required of the student. Also, in some instances, a given test task involved several objectives.

The tests at all grade levels contained a section assessing specific skills, which included the clusters of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and basic structure (including word usage and grammar). An additional section involved sustained writing; this, the written product, was assessed according to a number of descriptive scales--these encompassed the concepts of unity, coherence, organization, and style as well as word usage and mechanics. The written product was further assessed in a holistic manner; this provided a global indicator of writing ability.

Test Items

Items were designed to assess each of the objectives; these consisted of student writing samples (free response), and controlled response items to test specific skills objectives. The specific skills objectives were primarily assessed by (a) short-answer questions, i.e., the student is asked to answer a specific question (e.g., "Where is the comma placed in the following sentence?") and evaluated in terms of accuracy or correctness, and (b) multiple choice questions, i.e., the student is asked to select the most appropriate answer from a range of options given

Table 1

8

Categories of Writing Skills

ENCODING	THINKING (ORGANIZING & PROCESSING)
1. WRITING (SIGHT) VOCABULARY --spells common words by sight 2. PHONICS --uses phonetic skills as an aid to correct spelling 3. STRUCTURAL SYNTHESIS --uses a knowledge of word structures as an aid to correct usage and spelling (variant endings, roots, prefixes, suffixes) 4. CONTEXT --uses words correctly in context (meaning and function) 5. MEANING VOCABULARY --uses vocabulary which reflects increasing concept development from concrete to abstract (classifying, generalizing, multiple meanings, denotations, connotations) 6. PUNCTUATION --uses correctly the common punctuation marks to convey and clarify meaning (period, exclamation mark, question mark, comma, quotation marks, apostrophe, colon, semicolon, hyphen, dash, parentheses, italics, underlining) 7. SENTENCES --uses a variety of sentence forms appropriate to purpose 8. USAGE a) formal writing moves toward acceptable Canadian usage b) writing is deployed for a wide variety of purposes 9. DICTIONARY AND THESAURUS a) uses dictionary efficiently as an aid to spelling and meaning b) uses thesaurus efficiently as an aid to word selection and idiomatic usage 10. GRAMMAR --written work reflects an awareness of English syntax (order of words) and accidentance (forms of words that show case, number, person, tense, voice, mood, degree, or other relationships)	A. LITERAL MEANING Student's writing moves towards increased coherence, unity and emphasis. To achieve this, the writer: a) selects and organizes details so that they support, clarify, and emphasize the main idea b) organizes details or events in a logical sequence c) understands the relationships of: cause-effect, time, space, place d) uses an appropriate style and structure (punctuation; pronoun reference; connectives; figurative, picturesque, and idiomatic languages; type and style of writing--narrative, descriptive, expository) e) uses context to clarify intended meaning of words f) distinguishes among fact, opinion, fantasy B. EXTENDED MEANING a) anticipates and to some extent guides the direction of the reader's inferred meanings b) implies meaning c) creates suspense d) anticipates emotional reactions e) establishes an appropriate tone and regulates the mood f) presents clear verbal images g) develops analogies h) anticipates and influences the reader's conclusions C. CRITICAL AND REFLECTIVE EVALUATION The writer should develop the habit of evaluating his/her writing. To do this he/she must consider: a) his/her purpose b) the reader and situation c) the suitability of his/her material and expression (style) in relation to purpose and reader d) the validity of his/her ideas and supporting materials

NOTE: From Language Arts Skills K-XII, by Manitoba Department of Education, Winnipeg: Province of Manitoba, 1977.

Clusters and Samples of Objectives Submitted for
Priorization by Teachers

(One sample objective only is given for each grade level and cluster.)

	Grade 3	Grade 6
<u>CONVENTIONS OF WRITING</u>		
Spelling	Spell words with long and short vowels.	Spell words with silent letters.
Punctuation	Use periods after abbreviations.	Use commas to set off words of direct address.
Capitalization	Use capitals at the beginning of a sentence.	Use capitals for the first word of a quote.
Handwriting	Legibly write manuscript and cursive letters.	
Basic Structures of English	Identify and write declarative sentence types.	Use correct form--consistent verb tense.
Dictionary Usage and Study Skills	Use beginning dictionary as an aid to spelling.	Use dictionary as an aid to meaning.
<u>CONCEPTS OF UNITY AND COHERENCE</u>		
In Sentences	Write complete sentences.	Write appropriate topic sentences.
In Paragraphs	Write paragraphs that focus on the topic.	Relate supporting details to main idea.
<u>ORGANIZING AND WRITING PATTERNS</u>		
Organization of Ideas	Organize by time.	Give evidence of some logical organization.
Sentence and Paragraph Organization	Use compound sentences.	Use variety in sentence patterns.
Stylistic Devices and Language Development	Use language to communicate feeling.	Write with purpose or intent.
<u>TYPES OF WRITING</u>		
Social	Write friendly personal letters.	Write friendly letters--"thank you".
Business/vocational	(not considered)	Write business letters--ordering an item.
Scholastic communication	Write simple stories	Write stories that include character, setting, and plot.
<u>PROOFREADING</u>		
	Proofread for complete sentences.	Proofread for sentence structure.

Clusters and Samples of Objectives Submitted for
Priorization by Teachers

(One sample objective only is given for each grade level and cluster.)

	Grade 9	Grade 12
<u>CONVENTIONS OF WRITING</u>		
Spelling	Spell frequently confused suffixes--e.g., -ance, -ence.	Spell most frequently misspelled words due to mispronunciation and confusibles.
Punctuation	Use quotation marks.	Use underlining to indicate italics.
Capitalization	Apply capitalization consistently.	Apply capitalization rules consistently.
Handwriting	Legibly write manuscript and cursive letters.	Maintain legibility and fluency.
Basic Structures of English	Use correct forms--main and subordinate clauses.	Use parallel structures.
Dictionary Usage and	Use the thesaurus as an aid to word selection and idiomatic usage.	Proficiently use the thesaurus as an aid to word selection and idiomatic usage.
<u>CONCEPTS OF UNITY AND COHERENCE</u>		
In Sentences	Use appropriate transitional words and phrases for organizing by comparison.	Write sentences without redundancy and excessive lengthiness.
In Paragraphs	Write expository paragraphs.	Keep style, mood, and point of view consistent.
<u>ORGANIZING AND WRITING PATTERNS</u>		
Organization of Ideas	Organize ideas by cause and effect--cause-effect chains.	Support opinions with logic and/or facts.
Sentence and Paragraph Organization	Vary sentence structure to emphasize ideas, effect transition, and create effect.	Use or implied use of topic sentence.
Stylistic Devices and Language Development	Write without the use of overworked words and phrases, e.g., nice	Use literary devices, e.g., irony
<u>TYPES OF WRITING</u>		
Social	Write messages.	Write friendly letters--condolence.
Business/vocational	Write business letters of application.	Write a resume.
Scholastic Communication	Write a summary.	Write an opinion that reflects attention to the overall content of an argument of discussion.
<u>PROOFREADING</u>	Proofread for word choice and accuracy.	Proofread for clarity of purpose and intent.

(e.g., "Underline the correct form in each of these sentences"). An example, from the grade 6 test, of items to test specific skills in spelling is:

OBJECTIVE: Spells regular and irregular plural words

TEST ITEMS: (the students spell these words)

berries
questions
churches

A sustained writing task was required of all students at each grade level. In grades 3 and 6 this involved the writing of a story. Grade 9 students were asked to write a business letter and an expository paragraph, and grade 12 students wrote an expository essay. Each of these, except the business letter, was scored holistically and, including the business letter, according to a number of descriptive scales representative of the writing objectives.

Scoring Procedures

All student tests were scored manually. Scoring keys were produced for the specific skills sections of the tests. The written product was scored in two different ways (except for the business letter in grade 9). A global rating of the quality of the product was obtained first and then a number of descriptive ratings were determined. The business letter in grade 9 was scored according to three scales which were similar to those used for the descriptive scoring. The global rating was done quickly, with the intent of obtaining an impression--this is the holistic score. The descriptive ratings were based on scales reflecting key aspects of the writing.

Holistic scoring. Two scorers rated each written product (except the business letter) using the Holistic Marking Scale. This scale gives a global impressionistic rating of the overall quality of the writing. It is not dependent on any one aspect of the writing but rather on the total impact on the reader created by the writing.

HOLISTIC MARKING SCALE

- 5 = Highly Impressive--well above average in thought, sentence structure and word choice, mostly free from error. This is a very high level of performance expected only of a limited number of students.
- 4 = Commendable--in command of thought, sentence structure, and word choice, relatively free from error. This is a high level of performance indicating considerable writing ability.
- 3 = Questionable--probably functional in terms of thought and sentence structure, but in need of instruction. This is not unreasonable performance but some weaknesses and possible difficulties are apparent. Teacher assistance appears warranted.

2 = Minimal--in need of remediation, frustration level.

This is performance that exhibits a considerable number of difficulties, and assistance is essential.

1 = Insufficient material--not enough material to permit a judgement.

This is actually a 4-point scale as "1" indicates a written product that was impossible to judge; it is not the lowest score.

For the Provincial sample, scorers were trained and monitored to assure reliability of holistic scoring. Agreement between scorers was good at all grade levels--over 58 percent of student papers received identical scores from both scorers. Approximately 3 percent of student papers received scores that differed by more than one point. When this occurred a third scorer was assigned to the paper.

The two holistic scores were added to obtain the combined holistic score (the third score was averaged with the first two wherever it was necessary). Thus, combined holistic scores ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 10.

Descriptive scoring. One scorer rated each of the written products according to the descriptive scales. Descriptive scores are actually impressionistic ratings of the written work according to designated aspects. The scales used are similar to the following one taken from the grade 6 test.

Logical organization (the objective or aspect)

4 = Ideas appropriately organized by time, place, and sequence.

3 = Error in logical organization (one error).

2 = Error in logical organization (more than one error).

1 = Insufficient evidence.

This is actually a 3-point scale as "1" indicates material that is not sufficient to permit a judgement.

Nine, ten, and eight descriptive scales were used for the grade 3, 6, and 12 written products respectively. In grade 9 the business letter was rated according to three scales and the paragraph according to nine scales. Scorers were trained and monitored to maintain reliability of scoring. Periodically, scored papers were rescored by other scorers and any differences were discussed. Agreement on the appropriate score was attained.

Interpretation of Results

In the absence of previously obtained, representative information on writing performance by Manitoba students, it was necessary to adjudicate the performance on the present tests. An Interpretation Panel of five experienced Language Arts educators and a designate from the Manitoba Association of School Trustees was assembled for each of the four grade levels.

Individual Panel members stated the performance they could expect of students at that grade level under good teaching conditions. This was done for all writing objectives assessed by the tests. Grade level Panels then arrived at a consensus regarding expected performance.

After expected performance was obtained individual members compared the expected performance with that attained by the Provincial sample. The scale used was the following:

ACHIEVEMENT INTERPRETATION SCALE

Highly Satisfactory: Actual achievement is well beyond what is expected. This is considered to be an area of strength.

Satisfactory: Actual achievement is somewhat beyond what is expected.

Acceptable: Actual achievement corresponds approximately with what is expected.

Marginal: Actual achievement is somewhat below what is expected, but not to the point of being totally unacceptable. This is considered to be an area where some additional work is desirable.

Unsatisfactory: Actual achievement is well below what is expected. This is considered to be an area of weakness and remediation is deemed necessary.

Performance on each objective was interpreted. As a final step grade level Panels attempted to obtain consensus interpretations for the objectives. In the main agreement among Panel members regarding both expected performances and interpretations of actual performances was achieved.

It is necessary to note that all interpretations reflect the performances of the total sample at the particular grade level.

Samples of Student Writing

In order to give a clearer indication of student papers that warranted various scores, samples of student writing at all four grade levels are provided. The samples characterize what both scorers rated as "Highly Impressive" and as "Questionable". These samples are not "perfect examples" of the particular score level, but reflect qualities that are indicative of the scores attained. They give some idea of what students wrote, but do not indicate the rich variety of responses that were received. The writing samples are reproduced (in italics) as accurately as possible, including errors.

Grade 3 writing samples. Two samples of grade 3 stories are provided below. The first three sentences of the story were provided for the student; the additional sentences are the student's written product. Students received these written directions:

DIRECTIONS: Write a story about what happened to Pat and the creature.

Figure 1. Grade 3 Story: Holistic Score "Highly Impressive" by Both Scorers

One night Pat climbed into bed and quickly fell asleep. Then a most exciting thing happened. In a dream a strange creature took Pat on an adventure. Then the strange creature took him to another planet. Pat didn't know where he was, so he asked the creature where he was, "Mr. Creature what planet is this?" The creature answered "Call me Comedy". "OK". "Mr. Comedy tell me which planet is this?" Then Comedy answered "This is earth!" "Earth?" Pat echoed. "Yes." said Comedy chuckling.

"1,000,000 years before your time." "1,000,000 years!" Pat echoed again. "There was chocolate grass!" "Milkshake trees?" Pat exclaimed. "Let's go on," said Comedy. Comedy led him to a river that was full of candy rocks! "Yum." Pat exclaimed. "How would you like to go back to your time?" asked Comedy. "Not yet!" answered Pat. "I want to go back 500 years before my time!" "Hang on here we go!" said Comedy. There wasn't as much to see there. So Pat said "Let's go back to my time." When Pat woke up the next morning he sighed and said "Too bad it was just a dream!" And with that he fell asleep.

Figure 2. Grade 3 Story: Holistic Score "Questionable" by Both Scorers.

One night Pat climbed into bed and quickly fell asleep. Then a most exciting thing happened. In a dream a strange creature took Pat on an adventure. The stranger took Pat into a big forest. The stranger left Pat there. She was afraid. She started to yell for help. But no one came. Then the stranger came back with food. She ate all of it. After that she took a walk then she heard footsteps. Pat began to run she yelled and yelled for help. Then she woke up. It was just a nightmare. Pat told her mother that morning. Pat's mother agreed it was frightening.

Grade 6 writing samples. Two samples of grade 6 stories are provided below. The beginning of the story was provided for the student; the additional portion is the student's written product. Students received these written directions:

DIRECTIONS: You have been given the beginnings for three stories. Choose ONE of them and finish the story.

Figure 3. Grade 6 Story: Holistic Score "Highly Impressive" by Both Scorers

With knapsacks on their shoulders, three excited teen-agers set out to explore a cave deep in the forest. They had trudged a mile through the forest and were in sight of the cave, when suddenly, without warning . . . swoosh, in they went! They had fallen in a deep, steep hole, which was obviously some sort of trap. "How will we ever get out of here?" they questioned each other.

Sometime later, at about noon, they realized how dangerous their situation was. Since they had only planned on staying a day, their supplies were very meager. Jody had carried one first-aid kit containing a small package of band-aids, some adhesive tape, scissors, needles and thread, peroxide, paper, a pencil, aspirin, and a small amount of food and water. This, to them, seemed unnecessary at the time but luckily their parents had insisted. Jane, had carried the three canteens of

water, and Marion had carried the supply of food. At this time they realized they had enough for about a week, if they were careful. Another thing which added to their worries was that they had just told their parents they were hiking to no specific place.

At about 3:00, they heard footsteps coming from the cave. "Hello, up there!" she shrieked loudly, but the footsteps went right on by the trap. It was a though they couldn't be heard.

A few days later they had exactly half of what they had started out with. Suddenly, they heard heavy footsteps, much different from the one they had heard before. "Hello, up there!" they called and this time they got a reply.

"I'll be right with you," a big burly forest ranger called.

So the girls were rescued and that trap filled in but the first set of footsteps remained a mystery.

Figure 4. Grade 6 Story: Holistic Score "Questionable" by Both Scorers

It was "Pet Day" at school. Our teacher had finally agreed that we could bring our pets to school for one day. Everything seemed under control in the classroom as we got ready to introduce our pets to our classmates. Just then Bob brought in his cat. Then all the dogs went after it. They trampled down the teacher.

She said "Who's the guilty one?"

Nobody said anything. The dogs where all over the school. I spotted the cat. But just as I was going to grab it a dog running out. We final caught one and put him in the classroom. Then Brent was going to put a dog in the classroom the other one got out again Gary was running after a dog then he slipped on some soap. Kevin went after a dog and got tripped by a other dog and into a door We got the cat and found a dog in a water tube.

Grade 9 writing samples. Two samples of grade 9 paragraphs are provided below. Four topics were given to the student along with an indication of the audience to which the paragraph was to be directed. Five criteria for the paragraph were also given the student. The actual written directions to the student began with:

DIRECTIONS: Choose ONE of the following topics and write ONE PARAGRAPH ONLY. Your paragraph may be written in either a comic or serious vein.

Figure 5. Grade 9 Paragraph: Holistic Score "Highly Impressive" by Both Scorers

Topic: "You wish to give advice on buying a used car . . ."

Buying a used car can be risky. You can never be sure if the car is in really good condition. There are a few hints though that will save you a lot of sorrow. First of all, get the car up on a hoist and check the frame to see if it has been in an accident. A slightly bent frame which has been welded will tell you that it has been in a bangup. After being fixed a car is not really as trustworthy as before. Next, take a magnet and check to see if the body is made of metal or putty. After you have ascertained that the body is okay, have a trusted mechanic listen and check the motor to find out if any extensive repairs are necessary. Once you've decided that the car is all right you can decide if the condition of the car and the price fit together. After that the car is wholly your responsibility if you buy it.

Figure 6. Grade 9 Paragraph: Holistic Score "Questionable" by Both Scorers

Topic: ". . . the most important skill in your favourite sport . . ."

Since my favorite sport is fencing, particularly sabre. I would suppose that there are many things to talk about but a few are more important. The sabre is a difficult weapon to master considering that it is light, fast, and hard to defend against. A person would need very fast reflexes to "riposte" after an attempted "thrust" or many other problems would need the know-how to master. Also a person must know at all times where the opponent's blade is and to be able to instinctively know what the opponent will do next. All in all, fencing, and particularly the sabre, is a very difficult sport which requires much practise, training, and experience.

Grade 12 writing samples. Two samples of grade 12 essays are provided below. Grade 12 students were given five topics and four thesis statements and requested to write an essay on one of these. Seven criteria for scoring the essay were also provided. The written directions given to the student began with:

DIRECTIONS: Choose ONE topic from EITHER List A or List B....WRITE AN ESSAY ON THE TOPIC YOU HAVE CHOSEN.

Figure 7. Grade 12 Essay: Holistic Score "Highly Impressive" by Both Scorers

Topic: "The Right to Be Happy"

The "Right" to be Happy

The idea of a "Right" to be happy is most ridiculous. It is not recognized by even the most freedom-loving nation in the world, although some, like the United States, come fairly close. Why not? Because it is completely absurd and foolish to believe that such a right could be effectively administered.

To understand this, it is first necessary determine exactly what "rights" are. Contrary to popular Western beliefs, there is absolutely no such thing as a "God-given" right. A "right" is a privilege bestowed upon an individual (or group of individuals) by the society in which he lives. All rights come entirely from man. Thus, it can be said that nobody has the right to do anything, unless (a) he can effectively fight the will of his society; or (b) his society decides to give him such rights.

The next important concept is exactly what a right to be happy would entail. For the most part, it would mean that whatever a person feels is necessary to his happiness belongs to him by virtue of his rights. Such a system has several flaws. What would happen, for example, if a person decided that his happiness required an income of at least \$85,000 dollars/year, but at the same time required that he not have to work? More than just a few people would act in this manner, as greed is, after all, a common human characteristic.

Now, compare this system with that of the United States. The U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to pursue happiness. This is an extremely significant difference. Because there are usually many ways to pursue the one, finite pinnacle which is that person's idea of happiness, an individual may now (and, in fact must) pursue his happiness without interfering with the rights of others. This is what makes such a system workable, as opposed to one as absolute as a right to be happy.

Thus, it can be seen that a "right to be happy" is totally unfeasible. While it may be grand and noble in intent, it is unmanageable in practice, because of the near-infinite conflicts and paradoxes it creates within itself. The whole thing can be viewed as a giant Catch-22: I need something to be happy, so by law I must be allowed to have it, and yet my possession of it would make another man unhappy, so that I cannot have it. This system, therefore, simply cannot work.

Figure 8. Grade 12 Essay: Holistic Score "Questionable" by Both Scorers

Topic: "An Issue of Great Concern to Society"

Wild or domestic, large or small, vicious or gentle, animals have their own unique ways of getting their points across. If they could put it into words, animals would probably let people know just how badly they have done since man decided that he had the right to choose who would live and who would die. Exploited and corrupted by man for centuries, the responsibility for trying to minimize the extensive and very often irreversable damage done to life on earth lies at man's door. Helping animals, protecting them and defending their rights, is one of the most worthwhile and rewarding professions there is, can be attempted in many different ways, depending on the field you enter.

Although many animals have been hunted to extinction or the point of extinction, man's invasion and destruction of their habitats is far more dangerous to them, and is responsible for the extinction of many more species than guns are. Isolated islands, haven for birds, especially those who have lost their flight through evolution, were invaded by man. He introduced enemies the birds and animals which were formerly safe because they had no natural enemies: the result was almost inevitably extinction. Australia and Tasmania, homes of many marsupials which had long since vanished almost completely from the rest of the world, were discovered by Europeans who brought with them mammals which challenged the natural wildlife of the land. Such interference, introducing enemies which competed for, or possibly ruined, the environments of these animals, which resulted again in extinction or severe depletion of the number of species. North American and African species were very hard hit because of the sudden and very fast transformation of the land. Animals had no chance to retreat or adapt to new environments, as they had in Europe and Asia.

While hunting may have not been quite as damaging as transformation of habitats, man again is responsible for destroying species for "sport" or for money. Buffalo of North America were at the very point of extinction from hunting. Using next to nothing of the animal, carcasses were left rotting all over the prairies. Many African animals, large game, have suffered severe depletion from hunters after a "trophy". With such cruel and pointless killing, conservation work is very worthwhile and necessary.

Wild animals are not the only ones to suffer from man's inhumanity. Domestic animals are mistreated and neglected, through ignorance, indifference, laziness or cruelty. Small things, like riding a horse a little too far or a little too hard when he's not in shape, or deliberately torchering

a cat or dog to death, are very common occurrences that often go unnoticed. There is very little if anything the animal can do to protect himself; fighting back will only bring more punishment.

In laboratories, animals are being used, suffering and dying in the name of science. This is merely one more example of how "humane" people can be. Since animals have no chance to defend themselves, someone must do it for them. Because it is man's fault that animals suffer, whether it be from being hunted uselessly or being locked in a tiny cage in a zoo with a mob of big mouthed people staring at them, it is only logical that man should accept his responsibility toward them. By entering one of the many fields involved with animals, a person may, in some way be able to help undo the damage he has already done.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The global writing ability of students is reported on the basis of the holistic scoring of actual written products (sustained writing). At each grade the percentages of students achieving various levels on the holistic scale are given.

The Interpretation Panels provided an indication of the adequacy of student performance on each of the key aspects of sustained writing (descriptive scales) and on each of the objectives assessed as specific skills. Although the Panel's interpretations represent one subjective measure of student performance, it is necessary in the Summary to limit the presentation to these interpretations. The detailed account of student performance is provided in the General Report.

Grade 3 Results

The Grade 3 test assessed writing skills by two types of tasks, one involving a written product and the other involving specific skill responses. The written product was scored holistically and according to nine descriptive scales.

Written product: Holistic scoring. Grade 3 students were requested to write a story continuing from three sentences given. The stories were rated holistically according to the Holistic Marking Scale by two scorers. The scale categories were: Highly Impressive, Commendable, Questionable, and Minimal.

Of the 1,400 student stories scored, 30.0%¹ were considered "Highly Impressive" or "Commendable" by both scorers. An additional 18.9% were rated "Commendable" by one scorer and "Questionable" by the other. A total of 49.5% of students were considered in need of some instruction on the basis of their story writing. Only 6.1% of students (part of the 49.5%) were considered "Minimal", or in need of considerable assistance, by both scorers. The remaining 1.5% of student papers were too limited to permit scoring.

Written product: Descriptive scoring. The grade 3 stories were rated by one scorer on nine descriptive scales. Performance on each descriptive scale was further evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the scale: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

¹For clarity of the presentation in this section all percentages of student papers are given in symbols: e.g., 30%.

The Interpretation Panel considered performance of grade 3 students on four of the scales as "Satisfactory" and on the remaining five as "Acceptable". Thus, no distinct strengths nor weaknesses were discovered in student writing.

Table 3

Grade 3 Written Product: Interpretations of Descriptive Ratings

Descriptive Scale	Interpretation
1. Focus on Topic	Acceptable
2. Middle and Ending	Satisfactory
3. Organize by Time (Verb tense and sequence of events)	Acceptable
4. Descriptive Words and Phrases	Satisfactory
5. Topic Development (Communicate feelings, Creative)	Acceptable
6. Complete Sentences	Acceptable
7. Sentence Structure	Satisfactory
8. Punctuation and Capitalization	Satisfactory
9. Spelling	Acceptable

Specific skills. In total 20 objectives were assessed as specific skills. These were grouped within the clusters of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, sentence writing, sentence completion, and sentence identification. Performance on each objective was evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale.

Student performance on 12 of the 20 objectives was rated as "Acceptable"; these were primarily in spelling and capitalization. Performance on the five sentence completion and sentence identification objectives was rated as "Satisfactory". On one punctuation objective, "Use of question marks at the end of a sentence", performance was rated "Highly Satisfactory"; this punctuation skill was considered an area of strength.

Performance on one sentence writing objective was considered "Marginal". On one punctuation objective, "Use of apostrophes for contractions", performance was "Unsatisfactory"; this punctuation skill was considered an area of weakness.

Table 4

Grade 3 Specific Skills: Number of Objectives Receiving Each Interpretation

Clusters of Objectives	Achievement Interpretation Scale					Numbers of Objectives Tested
	Unsatisfactory	Marginal	Acceptable	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	
Spelling			7			7
Capitalization			3			3
Punctuation	1		1		1	3
Sentence Writing		1	1			2
Sentence Completion				3		3
Sentence Identification				2		2
Total Number of Objectives						20

Grade 6 Results

The grade 6 test assessed writing skills by two types of tasks, one involving a written product and the other involving specific skills responses. The written product was scored holistically and according to ten descriptive scales.

Written product: Holistic scoring. Grade 6 students were requested to select from three story beginnings and write a story continuing from the selected beginning. The stories were rated holistically by two scorers according to the Holistic Marking Scale: Highly Impressive, Commendable, Questionable, and Minimal.

Of the 1,344 student stories scored, 21.5% were considered "Commendable" or "Highly Impressive" by both scorers. An additional 21.2% were rated "Commendable" by one scorer and "Questionable" by the other. A total of 55.7% of stories were considered "Questionable" or "Minimal" by both scorers. Thus, 55.7% of students were considered in need of some instruction on the basis of their story writing. Only 7.5% of students (part of the 55.7%) were considered "Minimal", or in need of considerable assistance, by both scorers. The remaining 1.6% of stories were too limited to permit scoring.

Written product: Descriptive scoring. The grade 6 stories were rated by one scorer on ten descriptive scales. Performance on each descriptive scale was further evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the following scale: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

The Interpretation Panel rated performance of grade 6 students on the scale "Logical Organization" as "Highly Satisfactory"; this aspect was considered an area of strength. Performance on four scales was interpreted as "Satisfactory", and on the remaining five as "Acceptable". Thus, one strength and no distinct weaknesses were discovered in the student writing.

Table 5

Grade 6 Written Product: Interpretations of Descriptive Ratings

Descriptive Scale	Interpretation
1. Development of Topic	Satisfactory
2. Descriptive and Precise Vocabulary	Satisfactory
3. Logical Organization	Highly Satisfactory
4. Character, Setting, Plot	Acceptable
5. Variety in Sentence Patterns	Acceptable
6. Correct Usage	Acceptable
7. Paragraph Format	Acceptable
8. Complete Sentences	Acceptable
9. Punctuation and Capitalization	Satisfactory
10. Spelling	Satisfactory

Specific skills. In total 34 objectives were assessed as specific skills. These were grouped within the clusters of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, basic structure, and sentence writing. Performance on each objective was evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale.

Student performance on 14 of the 34 objectives was interpreted as "Acceptable"; of these, four were in spelling, one in capitalization, three in punctuation, and six in sentence writing. Of the eight objectives in basic structure, performance on three was interpreted as "Satisfactory", and on four was interpreted as "Highly Satisfactory". The latter four were considered areas of strength; they are: "Use of associated verbs", "Use of pronoun and antecedent", "Use of negatives", and "Use of homonyms". Performance on one objective in spelling, "Spelling of silent letters", was also interpreted as "Highly Satisfactory"; this skill was considered an area of strength as well.

Table 6
Grade 6 Specific Skills: Number of Objectives
Receiving Each Interpretation

Clusters of Objectives	Achievement Interpretation Scale					Numbers of Objectives Tested
	Unsatisfactory	Marginal	Acceptable	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	
Spelling	1	1	4		1	7
Capitalization	2	3	1			6
Punctuation	1	1	3			5
Basic Structure		1		3	4	8
Sentence Writing	2		6			8
Total Number of Objectives						34

Performance on one spelling, three capitalization, one punctuation, and one basic structure objective was interpreted as "Marginal". Performance was interpreted as "Unsatisfactory" on six objectives in all; these objectives were considered areas of weakness: "Spelling of possessives", "Capitalizing first word of a quotation" and "Capitalizing name of an organization or institution", "Use of commas in a direct address", and "Use of parallel structure in sentences" and "Use of inverted order in sentences".

Grade 9 Results

The first part of the grade 9 test included the specific skills and the second part contained both written products, the business letter and the paragraph. The business letter was scored on three descriptive scales whereas the paragraph was scored holistically and according to nine descriptive scales.

Written product: Paragraph--holistic scoring. Students were directed to select one topic from a list of four and to write a single paragraph pertaining to it. Two scorers scored the paragraph according to the Holistic Marking Scale: Highly Impressive, Commendable, Questionable, and Minimal.

Of the 1,475 student paragraphs scored, 36.8% were considered "Highly Impressive" or "Commendable" by both scorers. An additional 24.7% were rated "Commendable" by one scorer and "Questionable" by the other. A total of 34.0% were considered "Questionable" and "Minimal" by both scorers. Thus, 34.0% of students were considered in need of some instruction on the basis

of their paragraph writing. Only 3.4% of students (part of the 34.0%) were considered "Minimal", or in need of considerable assistance, by both scorers. The remaining 4.5% of paragraphs were too limited to permit scoring.

Written product: Paragraph--descriptive scoring. The grade 9 paragraphs were rated by one scorer on nine descriptive scales. Performance on each scale was further evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation scale: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

The Interpretation Panel considered performance on one of the nine descriptive scales as "Acceptable"; the remaining eight were rated as "Satisfactory" or "Highly Satisfactory". Those rated "Highly Satisfactory" were considered areas of strength; they are: "Focus on topic", "Usage", and "Spelling". No distinct weaknesses were discovered.

Table 7

Grade 9 Paragraph: Interpretation of Descriptive Ratings

Descriptive Scales	Interpretation
1. Focus on Topic	Highly Satisfactory
2. Topic Development	Satisfactory
3. Organization	Satisfactory
4. Word Choice	Satisfactory
5. Usage	Highly Satisfactory
6. Sentence Structure	Satisfactory
7. Variety in Sentence Patterns	Acceptable
8. Punctuation and Capitalization	Satisfactory
9. Spelling	Highly Satisfactory

Written product: Business letter. Grade 9 students were asked to write a business letter involving the purchase of a gift. The letter was scored by one person on three scales: "Format", "Content", and "Mechanics". Student performance on each scale was evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale.

Performance on the "Content" and "Mechanics" scales was interpreted as "Acceptable". On the "Format" scale performance was interpreted as "Unsatisfactory"; this aspect was considered an area of weakness.

Specific skills. There were 14 objectives tested in the specific skills portion of the test. The clusters of skills are spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence writing. Spelling was not keyed to objectives; performance on spelling was rated on an overall basis by the Interpretation Panel. Performance on each objective as well was rated by the Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale.

Performance on spelling was rated as "Acceptable". Performance on six additional objectives was also rated "Acceptable". Performance on one punctuation and one sentence writing objective was rated as "Satisfactory". There were no performances rated as "Highly Satisfactory".

Table 8

Grade 9 Specific Skills: Number of Objectives
Receiving Each Interpretation

Clusters of objectives	Achievement Interpretation Scale					Numbers of Objectives Tested
	Unsatisfactory	Marginal	Acceptable	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	
Spelling (overall)			1			1
Capitalization	1		2			3
Punctuation	4		2	1		7
Sentence Writing			2	1		3
Total Number of Objectives						14

No performances were rated as "Marginal". Performance on one capitalization objective, "Capitalizes proper nouns", was rated as "Unsatisfactory"; this is considered an area of weakness (caution is necessary since only one item was used for this objective).

Four punctuation objectives were rated as "Unsatisfactory"; these are considered areas of weakness. They are: "Use of apostrophes in quotations", "Use of commas between clauses", "Use of commas after introductory words", and "Use of end punctuation".

Grade 12 Results

The tests at the grade 12 level had a greater emphasis on the written product than did the other grades although specific skills in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and usage were also assessed. The written product was assessed holistically and according to eight descriptive scales. English 300 and English 301 student tests were randomly interspersed for scoring.

Written product: Holistic scoring. Grade 12 students chose their expository essay topic from five topic areas and four thesis statements. The essays were rated holistically by two scorers according to the Holistic Marking Scale: Highly Impressive, Commendable, Questionable, and Minimal.

Of the essays from the 467 English 300 students, 37.2% were considered "Highly Impressive" or "Commendable" by both scorers. An additional 24.8% were rated "Commendable" by one scorer and "Questionable" by the other. A total of 37.5% of essays were considered "Questionable" or "Minimal" by both scorers. Thus, 37.5% of English 300 students were considered in need of some instruction on the basis of their essay writing. Only 4.5% of essays (part of the 37.5%) were considered "Minimal", or in need of considerable assistance, by both scorers. The remaining 0.5% of essays were too limited to score.

Of the essays from the 279 English 301 students, 6.1% were considered "Highly Impressive" or "Commendable" by both scorers. An additional 14.0% were rated "Commendable" by one scorer and

"Questionable" by the other. A total of 77.8% of essays were considered "Questionable" or "Minimal" by both scorers. Thus, 77.8% of English 301 students were considered in need of some instruction on the basis of their essay writing. Approximately 26.2% of essays (part of the 77.8%) were considered "Minimal", or in need of considerable assistance, by both scorers. The remaining 2.2% of essays were too limited to permit scoring.

Written product: Descriptive scoring. Grade 12 essays were rated by one scorer on eight descriptive scales. Performance on each descriptive scale was further evaluated by the Interpretation Panel according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Marginal, and Unsatisfactory.

The Interpretation Panel rated performance of grade 12 English 300 students as "Acceptable" on one scale, and "Satisfactory" on four scales. Performance on four scales, "Interest of Content", "Style", "Punctuation and capitalization", and "Spelling", was rated as "Highly Satisfactory"; these aspects were considered areas of strength.

Performance of English 300 students was rated "Marginal" on one scale. Thus, no distinct weaknesses were detected.

Table 9

Grade 12--300 Written Product: Interpretations of Descriptive Ratings

Descriptive Scale	Interpretation
1. Interest of Content	Highly Satisfactory
2. Style	Satisfactory
3. Purpose	Satisfactory
4. Organization of Ideas	Satisfactory
5. Variety of Sentence Structure	Highly Satisfactory
6. Word Choice and Usage	Marginal
7. Punctuation and Capitalization	Highly Satisfactory
8. Spelling	Highly Satisfactory

The Interpretation Panel rated performance of grade 12 English 301 students as "Acceptable" on one scale, and "Satisfactory" on four scales. Performance on two scales, "Punctuation and capitalization" and "Spelling", was rated as "Highly Satisfactory"; these aspects were considered areas of strength.

Performance of English 301 students was rated "Marginal" on one scale. No distinct weaknesses were found.

Table 10

Grade 12--301 Written Product: Interpretations of Descriptive Ratings

Descriptive Scale	Interpretation
1. Interest of Content	Satisfactory
2. Style	Satisfactory
3. Purpose	Satisfactory
4. Organization of Ideas	Acceptable
5. Variety of Sentence Structure	Satisfactory
6. Word Choice and Usage	Marginal
7. Punctuation and Capitalization	Highly Satisfactory
8. Spelling	Highly Satisfactory

Specific skills. The clusters of objectives tested in the specific skills section were spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and basic structures. As in the grade 9 test, spelling items in the grade 12 test were not keyed to objectives. Spelling performance was rated by the Interpretation Panel on an overall basis. The 26 additional objectives were rated individually by the Panel. All interpretations were according to the Achievement Interpretation Scale.

Performance of the English 300 students was rated as "Acceptable" on 11 objectives. Performance on spelling and on two punctuation and two basic structures objectives was rated as "Satisfactory". Performance on two basic structures objectives, "Use of verb tense" and "Use of pronoun reference", was rated as "Highly Satisfactory; these skills were considered areas of strength.

Performance on five objectives was rated as "Marginal" for English 300 students. Also, performance on four punctuation objectives was rated as "Unsatisfactory", these are considered areas of weakness. These four objectives are: "Use of comma for parenthetical phrases", "Use of colon at the beginning of a list", "Use of apostrophe for possessive nouns", and "Underlining of book titles". The interpretation of the objective, "Use of apostrophe for possessive nouns", must be viewed with caution as the judgement is based on responses to one item.

Table 11

Grade 12--300 Specific Skills: Number of Objectives Receiving Each Interpretation

Clusters of Objectives	Achievement Interpretation Scale					Numbers of Objectives Tested
	Unsatisfactory	Marginal	Acceptable	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory	
Spelling (overall)				1		1
Capitalization		1	4			5
Punctuation	4	3	5	2		14
Basic Structures		1	2	2	2	7
Total Number of Objectives						27

Performance of the English 301 students was rated as "Acceptable" on spelling and on eight objectives. Performance on five punctuation and basic structures objectives was rated as "Satisfactory". Performance on four basic structures objectives was rated as "Highly Satisfactory"; these skills were considered areas of strength. The objectives are: "Use of verb tense", "Use of confusibles (e.g., affect, effect)", "Use of pronoun reference", and "Identification of redundant expressions".

Performance on three objectives was rated as "Marginal" for English 301 students. Also, performance on six objectives in capitalization and punctuation was rated as "Unsatisfactory"; these skills were considered areas of weakness. The objectives are: "Capitalization of proper nouns", "Use of comma for parenthetical phrases", "Use of colon at the beginning of a list", "Use of apostrophe for possessive nouns", "Underlining of book titles", and "Paragraph indentation for change of speaker". The interpretation of the objective, "Use of apostrophe for possessive nouns", must be viewed with caution as the judgement is based on responses to one item.

Table 12

Grade 12--301 Specific Skills: Number of Objectives
Receiving Each Interpretation

Clusters of Objectives	Achievement Interpretation Scale					Number of Objectives Tested
	Unsatis- factory	Marginal	Acceptable	Satis- factory	Highly Satis- factory	
Spelling (overall)			1			1
Capitalization	1	1	3			5
Punctuation	5	2	4	3		14
Basic Structures			1	2	4	7
Total Number of Objectives						27

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Writing Assessment Program was intended to provide feedback for program development and to produce Provincial data on which to base future evaluation. In addition, the program was to assist in the professional development of teachers and thereby enhance education for students in the Province. Some effects of the Program have already been noticed in schools, specifically

- a) the focus of attention on the writing performance of students in schools,
- b) the definition and review of educational objectives in writing,
- c) the introduction into schools of a method to assist teachers to assess accurately the quality of student writing (holistic and descriptive scoring),
- d) the presentation of a method by which teachers and others can make explicit their expectations of students in an area of study, and interpret student performance relative to the expectations.

Substantial teacher involvement occurred throughout the Program. This was done by teacher participation on the Technical Advisory Committee and by teacher assistance in setting objectives, scoring tests, and interpreting results. Meetings with teachers have been planned to provide follow-up to the release of results.

Close to 90 percent of all teachers who responded to the tests indicated that they would request enough test copies to test their entire class if writing were assessed in the future. This indicates that the Writing Assessment tests were considered useful by classroom teachers.

The findings of the Program regarding the assessment of writing illustrate many of the conclusions of other similar assessments. Some that should be noted are:

- a) Accurate assessment of student writing must be based on a wide range of skills and tasks, for, over the total range of objectives, a considerable variation exists in any student's performance.
- b) A number of tasks (or a longer sustained task) is necessary for assessing each objective. Student performance on an objective is highly dependent on the tasks selected to assess the objective. This is particularly evidenced in the variation of percentage correct for different items pertaining to the same objective.
- c) Even when scorers are trained, differences exist between the scores awarded the same paper by different scorers.
- d) Holistic scoring can be used by teachers to make quick, fairly reliable, judgements of the quality of student writing. This is particularly useful for the scoring of papers where there is a minimum of instructional feedback. Additional scoring can be done to provide the student with feedback on various aspects of the writing. If the additional aspects are carefully selected and limited in number, scoring can still be rapid and reliable.
- e) Expectations for student performance can be made by professionals familiar with the performance of students. These expectations tend to vary somewhat from one educator to the next so judgements of actual performance ought to be made by a team of persons.

Conclusions

It is difficult to summarize the conclusions regarding the writing ability of Manitoba students because of the number and range of skills assessed and the lack of comparative data. A

number of conclusions do appear warranted on the basis of student performance; these are provided in point form in the HIGHLIGHTS of the Report. It is necessary to elaborate briefly on a few points.

At grades 3 and 6 students were required to write a story whereas at grade 9 they were required to write a paragraph, which is a different kind of writing. At grade 12, English 300 and English 301 students wrote identical tests in which a greater emphasis was placed on the written product, an expository essay, than at the other grades.

On the basis of global (holistic) assessment of these written products it is apparent that:

- a) At all grade levels a substantial percentage of students were judged capable of a high level of proficiency in writing. The percentages of students clearly rated in this category were 30, 22, 37, and 26 in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 respectively.
- b) The proportion of students considered to write at a level that was at least functional for their particular grade (including those considered to be highly proficient and those exhibiting some weaknesses) exceeded 83, 77, 85, and 70 percent in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 respectively. At the grade 12 level, over 84 percent of the English 300 students appeared at least functional whereas approximately 47 percent of 301 students were rated at least functional.
- c) In grades 3 and 6 respectively 50 and 56 percent of students were considered to have some weaknesses in story writing. In grade 9 approximately 34 percent of students were considered to have some weaknesses in paragraph writing, and in grade 12 approximately 53 percent were considered to have some weaknesses in expository essay writing. On the basis of the grade 12 essay 38 percent of the English 300 students appeared to have some weaknesses in writing whereas 78 percent of the 301 students appeared in this classification.
- d) The apparent higher performance of students at the grade 9 level reflects the less demanding nature of the task involved, a paragraph, rather than overall higher ability.

On the basis of the scoring of the written products on key aspects of writing, the Interpretation Panels' adjudications suggested that:

- e) Few key aspects of the writing were systematically weak on average for students at each particular grade level. Average performance of students at the grade 12 level on word choice and usage was considered to be somewhat below grade level expectations.
- f) Grade 9 students wrote a business letter as well as a paragraph. On average, students were rated as being weak in setting the format of the letter.

On the basis of the scoring of student performance on specific skills of writing, the Interpretation Panels' adjudications suggested that:

- g) Some strengths and some weaknesses occurred on average in specific writing skills at all grade levels. The only grade level pattern that emerged was that fewer skills were indicated as weak at the grade 3 level than at the other levels. All grades appeared to have some weaknesses in the area of punctuation. Performance on some basic structure skills, which include grammatical skills, was considered as above expectation for the particular grade level for all four grades.

- h) Although a number of weaknesses were disclosed in specific skills in all four grades, these weaknesses were not always apparent in the actual written products. On the written products, performances in basic structure, punctuation and capitalization, and spelling were typically rated as "Acceptable" at that grade level, or higher, for all grades.

Recommendations

While the findings of this Writing Assessment indicate that student performance on average is acceptable, there is evidence that as many as 50 percent of students are in need of an increased and more consistent emphasis on writing. Since the ability to communicate in writing is so fundamental to future success, it is strongly suggested that the Minister through his Department support a number of recommendations.

1. That the General Report be considered in detail in terms of implications for their work by all educators and educational groups involved in the teaching and assessment of student writing.

To educators working on program development:

2. That though the present assessment was restricted of necessity to a limited range of writing tasks, no program should be limited to the types of writing and writing skills actually assessed.
3. That curriculum should emphasize a wide range of writing abilities and provide for student practice in a variety of writing types.
4. That consideration be given to the demands of writing in additional curriculum areas.
5. That curriculum should delineate a variety of writing tasks in terms of purpose, audience, and forms, and designate the appropriate grade levels for introduction of these tasks. Some examples are: expository, descriptive, and narrative types of writing; letters and memoranda.
6. That the curriculum guides should reflect the latest research findings on the teaching and learning of writing, and make clear the complexity of the process.

To those involved in the preservice and inservice training of teachers and the support and delivery of curriculum (Department personnel as well as University and College faculties and professional educational organizations):

7. That the pattern of workshops already initiated as a result of the Writing Assessment Program be continued to assist teachers in the identification of writing objectives, and the development of skills in the teaching and assessment of written expression.
8. That school divisions and schools establish workshops to consider the contents of the Writing Assessment Report in depth and to plan a follow-up action appropriate to local needs.

To educators at the school level:

9. That more emphasis be placed on the composing of written expression as a more effective method of instruction than the teaching of isolated skills.

10. That students should be required to do more pointed writing exercises aimed at specific purposes and audiences.
11. That more emphasis be placed at the high school level on developing an appropriate and mature vocabulary and its usage.
12. That special attention should be given to the diagnosis and instruction of students who are not functional writers.

Some further possibilities are recommended for consideration by the Joint Committee on Evaluation, Technical Advisory Committees, and the Measurement and Evaluation Branch for subsequent testing programs:

13. That the planned three year cycle of testing in writing be utilized to develop an accurate index of writing proficiency for Manitoba. The present study provides only baseline data for future comparisons. Some content elements of this assessment should be retained for future assessments to permit valid comparisons.
14. That further analytical study of the present student papers be conducted to ascertain more specific strengths and weaknesses in student writing products. Such analysis is time consuming and expensive but could involve a subsample of the 10 percent Provincial sample.
15. That a wider view of writing skills should be considered for inclusion in future assessments. The present program made no pretense at covering the wide range of writing abilities necessary for students. A future writing assessment may begin by specifying the variety of writing purposes and analysing these for possible assessment.
16. That future assessment programs include more substantial questionnaires to obtain additional information from both teachers and students. Curriculum committees and other bodies as well as teachers should be requested to indicate the information that would be most useful to them in addition to student performance data.